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ABSTRACT

It is easier for non-English-speaking preschool children to learn new concepts if they are introduced in their own language. Once the child has mastered the concept, it can be introduced in the second language. The program described in this report is designed for Mexican-American preschool children. Content of the program is selected to relate meaningfully to the child's experience, background, knowledge, and skill building. The English component of the program views language as an internalized, self-contained system of rules according to which sentences are created, spoken, or understood. The child is not explicitly told a rule; he is shown how a rule works through carefully selected and sequenced representative examples of English sentences. The English program is characterized by realistic situations, meaningful responses, individual response, acceptance of all appropriate responses, emphasis on questioning, use of complete forms, and initial emphasis on syntax, not vocabulary. (VM)

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BILINGUAL LEARNING FOR THE SPANISH SPEAKING PRESCHOOL CHILD

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Although numerous early childhood projects have focused on the development of educational programs for disadvantaged children, relatively little specific attention has been given to those children in our society who enter school speaking a language different from that of the wider community. For example, approximately 40 percent of the more than five million persons in the United States of Mexican origin or ancestry live in Texas. Most of these persons are native Spanish speakers living and working in an English speaking society. The 1960 census in Texas reported that the median school years completed by the Anglo population over twenty-five years of age was 11.5 years. But only 6.1 years for the comparable Spanish surname population. Typically, the Mexican American child--urban and migrant--with a home language of Spanish, reaches school age with little knowledge of English. His proficiency in Spanish is often limited as well. One result is that a large percentage of Mexican American children in Texas fail the first grade. They fail because they are so involved in learning English they cannot master first grade content.

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According to Dr. Bruce Gaarder of the United States Office of Education, bilingualism can be either a great asset or a great liability. In our schools millions of children have been cheated or damaged, or both, by well intentioned, but ill informed educational policies, which have made of their

bilingualism an ugly disadvantage in their lives. Children entering school with less competence in English than monolingual English speaking children will probably become retarded in their school work to the extent of their deficiency in English, if English is the sole medium of instruction. On the other hand, the bilingual child's conceptual development and acquisition of other experience and information could proceed at a normal rate if the mother tongue were used as an alternate medium of instruction.

Research on bilingualism indicates that whether or not bilingualism constitutes a handicap, as well as the extent of such a handicap, depends upon the way in which the two languages have been learned. The result of a study conducted in Montreal by Lambert indicated that if the bilingualism was balanced, that is, if there had been equal, normal literacy developed in the two languages, bilingual ten-year-olds in Montreal were markedly superior to monolinguals on verbal and nonverbal tests of intelligence. They appeared to have greater mental flexibility, a superiority in content formation, and a more diversified set of mental abilities.

Proficiency in two languages is not, however, a sufficient goal for bilingual education. In the United States, increasing emphasis has been placed on the need for educational interventions which will provide the non-English speaker with the concepts necessary for success within the public school system. Initially, designers of such interventions focused on linguistic problems relevant to learning a second language. As these approaches began to be applied in experimental learning contexts, it became evident that the learner progressed more rapidly on both concept and language acquisition when he did not have to learn the concept through the new language, but rather was permitted to use his own language for concept acquisition. The subtle

implication of this is that concept acquisition is facilitated by use of one's first language, not only because the language is familiar and presents no interference to the assimiliation of content, but also because the new concept can be readily tied to existing concepts within the learner's ideational system. Further, the integration of a new concept with familiar concepts is facilitated when the referents of the new concept grow out of the same culture as the referents of the familiar concepts.

This suggests that the concepts which the non-English speaking child in the United States brings to school with him are far more sophisticated than his faltering use of the English language and lack of familiarity with the Anglo middle-class culture of the public school give him the opportunity to demonstrate. It also raises questions about the most appropriate way to teach English to non-English speakers in the United States, and the most appropriate way to tie concepts based on the Anglo culture to the existing culture-derived concepts of the learner.

One institution for which this question is of primary concern is the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory located in Austin, Texas, and one of eleven regional laboratories created by the federal government to improve the quality of education within the United States. Children who are economically disadvantaged or culturally different compose SEDL's target population. The majority of the children within the target population speak little or no English when they enter school.

In determining the philosophy and approach for the creation of the Bilingual Early Childhood Education Program, the Laboratory drew upon research literature in the fields of bilingual education, early childhood education, and educational psychology; the empirical research conducted by

the Laboratory's Migrant Educational Development Program on the educational needs of Mexican Americans; and the basic development goals of the Laboratory.

Staff members with varied background--educational psychologists, developmental psychologists, early childhood specialists, learning disability specialists, linguists, research and evaluation specialists, bilingual teachers, paraprofessionals, and parents--helped to identify strategies for the instructional program. Their knowledge contributed to the design of instructional sequences that matched the developmental needs of the children. Their interaction during the design stage minimized the possible conflicts that could arise between the curriculum of the school and the culture of the home.

Specific assumptions regarding the target population support the instructional program. These assumptions are based on extensive observations both in the home and the school, as well as objective test data, and represent the strengths developed during the child's early years.

1. The Mexican American child at age three comes to school with a language. He can communicate effectively in Spanish with both adults and peers.
2. For the most part, his basic perceptual abilities are intact and there is no evidence of the existence of unusual or extensive learning disabilities.
3. Due to the existence of a strong family system the majority of the children have developed many of the inter-personal skills that usually do not emerge until later years.
4. The child has had many meaningful experiences within his home environment and brings to school an experiential knowledge base.

Goals for the instructional program build upon the strengths identified in the target population. All instruction begins with the child's home language. Acceptance and usage of the child's language is critical to the development of a healthy self-concept. The objective of the program is to build up competence in the child's first language by expanding his basic fund of information and only after a child has demonstrated mastery is the concept introduced in the second language.

Building upon intact basic perceptual abilities, experiences have been designed which require that the child use all sensory channels available for encoding and decoding information. These activities systematically focus on a sequential presentation of sensory motor experiences to which language can be attached through the use of concrete objects that are perceptually meaningful.

Typically, the three-year-old Mexican American child has internalized the values of cooperation, sharing, and independent responsibility for many of his basic needs. Extension of these strengths in terms of program goals involve the development of individually assigned tasks which enable the child to work toward an increased attention span, persistence in task completion and self evaluation.

Content of instructional units is carefully selected to relate meaningfully to the child's experience background. Instruction during the first weeks of school systematically focuses on the child's new environment. People in the room are identified, rules of behavior are specified, and instructional materials are located and labeled. This initial introduction to school is followed by materials on self-awareness. This enables each child to become more aware of himself as he relates to others, which he must do

before he can meaningfully perceive his new environment. Instruction sequentially moves from the familiar to the less familiar. Stereotyped concepts are avoided, both for the child's culture and the dominant Anglo culture.

Unit organization integrates and reinforces the skills learned in the different types of lessons. Whenever possible, lessons in all areas have been planned to correlate with concepts introduced in the unit. Since many of the new concepts are unfamiliar to the child, he cannot be expected to fully master them in just one lesson. The unit approach allows opportunities for him to become familiar with these concepts in several types of lessons and to apply them in other contexts.

In all its aspects, the program moves sequentially from what the child knows to what he does not know. Concepts appear first in Spanish, then in English; content begins with concrete objects, moves to pictures and two-dimensional representations, and concludes with only the use of words. Within each skill level the child builds gradually in small steps, adding new elements to his skill or learning new applications for skills acquired in other contexts. Because of the unit construction, new knowledge and skills from one type of lesson can be reinforced, in either language, in different types of lessons. All of these features integrate the program and insure that the child's learning is firmly grounded, meaningful to him, and useful for thinking and problem solving.

The English language component of the preschool and bilingual kindergarten programs, has been strongly influenced by the Navajo Bilingual Academic Curriculum, prepared under the direction of Robert D. Wilson. This influence is particularly evident (1) in the underlying assumptions of the component

(drawn from linguistic, learning, and pedagogical theory), (2) in the broad objectives of the component, (3) in the selection and sequencing of the material presented, and (4) in the basic teaching procedures used.

The English language component is firmly rooted in the notion that language is, basically, an internalized, self-contained system of rules according to which sentences are created, spoken, or understood. To "know a language" is to have internalized the system of rules according to which native speakers of that language utter and understand sentences. The goal of the teaching of English, then, is for the learner to internalize the set of rules according to which (1) he can create and utter sentences that an English speaker will readily understand, and (2) he can readily understand the English sentences spoken by others, sentences which he may never have uttered or heard before. It is the learner's ability to speak and understand sentences beyond those used in the teaching, that must be the final test of an English language program for non-native speakers of English. If at the end of a language program the learner is able to speak and comprehend only those sentences included in the language program, then he has learned the language program, but he has not learned the language. The language program described in the following pages is designed (1) to reveal to the learner, through carefully selected and sequenced English language samples, the system which underlies the particular sentences used, and (2) to involve him actively in the use of the language structures so revealed. The particular sentences used in the program do not have tremendous significance in and of themselves. They do not convey weighty meanings, but rather are clear manifestations of parts of the underlying language system according to which the child will ultimately comprehend and produce many other English sentences.

Each element of the basic definition of language (above) has been crucial in shaping the Basic English Language Structures Program. Let's look at those elements one by one, to see how the key concepts in this notion of language (rules, internalized, system, self-contained, spoken or understood, created) have shaped the writing of this component.

Rules

Far less time is available for teaching our students their second language (English) than was available for "teaching" them their first language. Since we can provide our students with only a very limited amount of "second language data," we will have to control, to structure, that language data, if we want our students to evolve--in a short period of time--a system of rules like the native speaker possesses.

This English language program controls the language data presented to the child in three ways:

1. Selection: The items (rules) taught are those which are most general and basic, those which constitute the skeletal framework of English, those which are the fundamental elements, relationships and processes according to which native English speakers form, utter, and understand sentences. No nursery rhymes are included; no "pleasantry language" is introduced (e.g., "How are you? I'm fine. What's your name? John. Where do you live?" etc.); and very little vocabulary is taught. (This component often uses the vocabulary taught in the other components). In short, it is the goal of revealing the system of rules of English that has governed the selection of items for the lessons.
2. Sequence: The selected items are arranged so that the step the child takes from one rule to the next is small (e.g., "John is hopping," then, "John

is hopping to Mary."); so that the new rules are constantly integrated with those previously learned (enabling the child to build a system of interrelationships); and so that flesh is gradually put on the skeleton --the basic framework--by returning to rules and relationships learned earlier in a simple, basic (and accurate!) form, and expanding them at increasingly complex levels. This involves spiral learning, not unlearning re-learning.

3. Amount: In each lesson the number of new rules taught (or the number of new relationships among familiar rules taught) is strictly controlled. The aim is that the child completely control a basic framework according to which he can organize and interpret language he encounters subsequently, rather than that he be superficially exposed to a wide range of rules. However, the activities in which the language is used, the games and procedures in which the children are involved, are deliberately varied. It is the language patterns presented and not the children's active participation, that is limited in each lesson.

Besides controlling the amount, selection and sequencing of language data presented, the program employs a basic teaching method which increases the probability that the learner will internalize the set of English rules. In each lesson there is a period of initial listening for the child, approximately three minutes long. During this period, clear, sharply-focused examples of the rule(s) for that lesson are presented, from which the child can induce the rule(s). We have all known far too many children learning English as a second language who say things like "I jumping" or "This a block." Many of these children were required to produce unfamiliar sentences in the new language before they had been given ample opportunity to listen to these

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sentences, to process them mentally, to grasp the elements and combinations of elements that were present. Traditionally, experts in the teaching of English as a second language have told us "Listening first, then speaking..." But few programs have taken this advice to heart (the "Wilson program" being a notable exception). This program does take the "listening first" advice to heart; in each lesson the child is to listen first and induce the rule, and then to speak, applying the rule in a way (verbally) that will enable the teacher to provide feedback as to the correctness of his induction. Notice that the listening is prior to the speaking; it does not replace it.

There seems to be some confusion among second language teachers, about what "listening" and "speaking a language" are. Some have regarded listening as a passive thing--as simply the absence of saying something. But "listening" is used here to refer to a very active and demanding process, that process in which the brain organizes, structures, interprets, relates the sounds it receives. Development of this kind of listening ability clearly has significance for the child which reaches far beyond its importance to him in learning English. Throughout his school career (and beyond), keen listening ability can be one of the child's greatest intellectual assets.

Some have regarded "speaking" in the second language as little more than making verbal noises using some vocabulary items from the second language. But to speak sentences in a language is to engage in rule-governed behavior; it is to apply rules which one has discerned. One cannot apply rules which he does not possess. Far too much of our verbalization in the second language classroom has required children to utter strings of sounds which they have not yet processed mentally through active listening. By having the children listen first and then speak, this program aims to substitute rule-governed

English verbal behavior (i.e., "speaking English"!) for the all-too-typical uttering of strings of verbal sounds.

This procedure of moving from inducing the rule through active listening to applying the rule in speaking, is sound scientific procedure as well as sound second language learning procedure. The scientist observes particular cases and makes a hypothesis based on his observations; the second language learner listens to particular English language samples and induces the rule--the pattern of elements and combinations--underlying the samples he has heard. The scientist tests his hypothesis in a controlled situation and either confirms or disconfirms it; the second language learner speaks sentences according to the rule he has induced, and receives feedback from the teacher as to the correctness of his induction. The scientist makes his steps very explicit; the five-year-old Spanish speaker learning English does not. But the process this language program employs is composed of a comparable set of steps to discover and confirm language rules from a given set of data, just as the scientist attempts to discover and confirm physical laws or principles from his data. In using this learning procedure, the child is developing a powerful tool for <u>all</u> his learning, not just for language learning.

<u>Internalized</u>

At no point in the English language program is the child explicitly told a rule; at no point is he told what does or does not occur in English. Rather he is <u>shown</u>, through carefully selected and sequenced representative samples of English sentences; what does occur in English, what kinds of basic elements and combinations the language does include. Further, at no point in the program is the child asked to explain or justify why he selects and combines certain elements in one way rather than another. He is simply expected to

induce rules from the samples provided, and then to speak and understand according to them. We know that very few native speakers of a language are able to specify accurately to "externalize"--the set of rules governing their speech and understanding. We don't ask this of second language speakers, any more than we ask it of native speakers. And we know further, that ability to specify the rules does not cause a native speaker of English to be a better speaker of English. The group of native English speakers who are linguists by profession and <u>are</u> able to specify the rules of their language, do not speak English better than the group of native English speakers who are physicists by profession and who are <u>unable</u> to specify the rules of their language. So--the child in this program will not listen to or speak language rules; rather, he will listen and speak <u>according to</u> language rules which he will internalize from the data provided.

<u>System</u>

An effort is made throughout the program to teach each part of the system in its entirety. For example, the entire set of subject pronouns is presented, then the entire set of object pronouns. The whole set of articles, of basic verb types, of basic adverb types, of basic question types, etc.--the <u>total</u> set of significant structures within some area of English syntax is taught, rather than just those specific items which are used most frequently in conversation. Further, the structures taught are deliberately presented in various combinations and relationships. Within each lesson, related question and answer structures are paired (as is done in the "Wilson program"). New structures are regularly integrated with those previously learned. Many lessons are included which do not present new structures, but serve only to relate previously learned structures in new ways. And so the program gradually

reveals the system: by presenting the total set of significant elements and relationships for each major syntactic area, by constantly combining and re-combining familiar structures, by incorporating new structures with those already learned.

Self-Contained

Contrastive studies of Spanish and English, and the past experience of those who have taught English to native speakers of Spanish, have been helpful in suggesting which parts of the English language system may be troublesome for the native Spanish speaker to learn, at which points the learner may encounter strong interference from Spanish. This information has helped us decide how much time to devote to the teaching of the various parts of the program. But the information from contrastive analysis and teachers' experience, has not guided our selection of what to teach. Only the English language system itself--without reference to Spanish or any other language system--can determine what must be taught. And what must be taught is precisely the set of rules basic to English. This English language program is not a patch-work, a bits-and-pieces approach designed to prevent particular predicted errors. The child is not told "In Spanish you say X; in English you say Y." He is not encouraged to think of Spanish and English as sets of equivalences or near-equivalences. He is, rather, encouraged to learn English wholly within the system of English, to "think in English."

Spoken or Understood

This program provides for both of these basic language behaviors by utilizing listening activities followed by speaking activities in each lesson. The typical movement of the child's participation in a lesson is from listening only (approximately three minutes), to listening and overtly responding

(e.g., following commands, nodding or shaking his head in answer to a "yes-no" question), to answering questions (responding to conversation initiated by someone else), finally to asking questions and giving commands--i.e., taking over the full responsibility for initiating and propelling conversation. Of course the later activities in a lesson require active listening as well as speaking, for the child is responding to meanings in his speech; he is not unthinkingly parroting a teacher's question or answer in a group.

Created

How does the program move the child toward the creative use of English, toward that capacity which the native speaker possesses to say sentences he has not previously encountered? Obviously, by presenting him with, and having him practice using, the basic system according to which such sentences can be formed. But also, by having the child select and ask questions in virtually every lesson, (and not simply give rote answers), and by accepting--indeed, encouraging--a variety of verbal responses, the program conveys to the child the notion of flexibility, the idea that this language allows for infinite variety within the rule system. This notion is crucial to his eventual creative use of English. There is progressive movement from close control of language structures toward more flexible use of the language, both within individual lessons and within each level--each year's sequence of lessons.

Basic Tenets

The following principles apply throughout the Basic English Language Structures component:

1. Realistic situations. The situations which provide the context in which the language structures of a lesson are used, are as appropriate and natural as possible. For example, the child who is going to ask a question about an

action which was performed does not hear the teacher give the command for that action and does not see the action performed. If he heard the teacher's command ("Jump, John.") or saw the action performed, he would have no reason to ask the question "What did John do?"--he already knows, so his question would just be carrying out drill practice in asking questions, it would not be practice in using language in a purposeful way. Every effort is made to keep the classroom situations from becoming "drill-like"; we try to keep them "life-like," for it is in life, not in drill, that we want the children to use English.

2. Meaningful responses. There is no mindless parroting of teachers' utterances written into this program. There are no instances like the following:

Teacher: What's he doing? (Say it.)
Children: What's he doing?
Teacher: He's running.
Children: He's running.
Teacher: What's she doing?
Children: What's she doing?
Teacher: She is walking.
Children: She is walking.

The reason for the exclusion of such parroting is simple: such parroting is verbalization, but it is not language, and language is what we are teaching. Language involves meaning, and therefore we teach the child to create, utter, and respond to sentences which convey meaning. This involves the "mindfulness" of inducing and applying language rules, not the "mindlessness" of repeating strings of sounds. Also, language involves a variety of responses, but parroting allows only prescribed responses.

3. Individual response. The children do not speak in chorus in this program because that is simply not the way people speak a language. (When was the

last time you conversed in chorus?) It is language, not choral speaking, that we are teaching. Further, speaking in chorus invariably distorts the natural rhythms of the language, so that the children end up practicing chanting, but not practicing speaking a language. And finally, the very individual errors that the teacher needs to hear and correct are hidden when the children speak as a group, and we end up with still more "I jumping" children.

4. Acceptance of all appropriate responses. Every correct and appropriate response (question, answer, nonverbal response, or whatever) is accepted, even if it is not the response the teacher expected and was hoping to practice. This is so much harder than it sounds! But the teachers using the program are trained and regularly reminded to keep in mind always, that the greater the variety of acceptable responses the children give, the more we know that they are moving toward that ultimate goal--the creative use of English.

5. Emphasis on questioning. If a child does not know how to question, his power for learning is severely limited. The children ask questions in every lesson. The program teaches the children (a) to ask questions (in lesson after lesson, questioning is the fundamental activity), (b) how to ask questions (how to formulate each basic type of question syntactically), and (c) to select appropriate, relevant questions (to select their own questions in various situations).

6. Use of complete forms followed by use of shorter forms. When a new structure is introduced, it is given in its complete form, even though the full form might seem somewhat unnatural in conversation. This procedure (as usual) comes from our concern that the children induce the language rules. Elements in and relationships between structures are more apparent in full

forms than they are in shortened, more conversational forms. For example, the parts of and relations between

"He is running." and "He is not running."

or

"He is running." and "Is he running?"

are more immediately apparent and more unambiguous than the parts of and relations between

"He's running." and "He isn't running."

or

"He's running." and "Is he running?"

With the full forms, the addition of the negative element ("not") to the basic sentence, and the rearrangement of the "He is" to "Is he" in the question are obvious; with the shortened forms, this addition and rearrangement are less obvious.

Just as it is important to present the full forms initially so that the child can internalize the systematic processes which are operating, so it is important to move to the more conversational shorter forms once the children "have" the rules. Moving from the full to the shorter forms is not only important because the shorter forms are the more natural forms for native speakers to use, but also because they demonstrate the operation of another important process in English (and in every language):--that of deletion. The full forms of new structures are written into the dialogues initially, and the shorter, more conversational forms are written into the dialogues later.

7. Initial emphasis on syntax, not vocabulary. Lessons in this program include the teaching of vocabulary. However, vocabulary teaching is not the main purpose of the lessons. For the first part of the program, particularly,

only enough vocabulary is taught to enable the children to use the structures with some flexibility. Later, with a shift in emphasis to content teaching (after some degree of syntactic control is assured), vocabulary teaching becomes more important. Further, much of the vocabulary teaching is done in other components.

The points discussed so far all concern the structural aspects of the English language program: learning to use the processes for speaking and understanding English, learning how to manipulate the sounds, words, sentences of English, learning how to select elements and combine them in ways that convey intended meanings. What does the program do about the functional aspects of English? What about English as a tool for learning, for conceptual development? What role can learning English play in self-concept development?

There is a definite shift of focus in Level III of the three-level preschool program and in the latter part of the one-year kindergarten program, from learning to manipulate the syntactic structures of English, to utilizing those structures in conceptual learning. That is, the first part of the preschool and kindergarten programs develop the child's capacity to express meanings in English, assure that he has some facility in the mode of expression; and the latter portion of each program uses that expression in developing intellectual concepts. The syntax of English is the <u>end</u> in the first part of the program; it is the <u>means</u> to the end of cognitive development in the latter part of the program. This arrangement assures that the child will, at any one time, be focusing either on gaining control of the expression (the syntax of the language), <u>or</u> on gaining control of the content (the basic concepts and "world view" of the native speakers of the language), but he will not be required to cope with the two difficult areas (expression and content)

simultaneously.

Notice that the two parts of the programs are not unrelated. Several learning processes which are basic to the expression-focus part of each program are also basic to the content-focus part of each program. Throughout the first part of each program, there is a major emphasis on questioning: in every lesson the child asks questions. He is systematically taught to use the various types of question structures; he is given frequent opportunities to select appropriate questions in various situations; he is submerged in the notion that questioning is a good thing, and that this behavior is appropriate to the school setting. And this same emphasis on questioning continues throughout the latter portion of the English program. Also, the basic procedure of first inducing the rule through listening and observation, and then applying the rule in progressively freer, less controlled situations is constant throughout the program. In short, in the first part of the program the child is learning English, but he is also learning how to learn. These procedures for learning are utilized throughout the program and lend continuity to it.

Finally we should ask "Does the Basic English Language Structures component serve in any significant way to enhance the child's good feelings about himself as a worthwhile human being?" There is little empirical data about what "self-concept" is and how it is positively developed; mostly we play our best hunches. However, we feel certain that building success upon success in the child's school experience can only serve to increase his feelings of personal worth. The English lessons try to assure the students' success by:

1. carefully controlling the amount of structure being focused on within each lesson, so that the child knows that he will be responsible for

a limited goal that is within his reach;

2. informing the child clearly at the outset of each lesson, what it is that he is responsible for in that lesson;
3. providing ample practice of new structures and relationships, in each lesson moving from teacher to student control of the use of the structures;
4. steadily sequencing and regularly integrating the syntactic structures;
5. providing immediate, unambiguous feedback about the child's response, and--if his response is in error--informing him of what his error was and what the correct form is;
6. evaluating, at the end of each lesson, the child's ability to use the new structure or the new relation of structures which was presented at the outset of the lesson and practiced throughout, so that the child leaves each lesson with the definite and concrete knowledge that he has --once again--mastered the objective.

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